

UNIT 4 : Narrative Writing

Recommended Prior Knowledge: A reasonable standard of written English at O/GCSE level will ensure familiarity with the writing of compositions

Context This Unit has as its subject the acquisition of skills for Paper 2 Section A, and can be undertaken at any time during the course

Outline The Unit addresses the writing of narrative, focusing on the skills and practice needed for writing a good short story of 600-900 words in one hour under examination conditions. The writing of dialogue is also included.

Learning Outcomes	Suggested Teaching/Learning Activities	Resources
<p><u>1 Working with Plot:</u></p> <p>A short story of 600-900 words should not have a plot that is too complicated. A narrative is a series of events, but too many unlikely or dramatic ones will not help in developing a convincing account. A story can revolve around the consciousness of a character in a daily routine and still be very effective. Every day our own lives contain many narratives and parts of narratives, and students can draw on these effectively from the beginning of an AS level course</p>	<p>These activities will give students confidence that they have within their grasp all the material they will need for successful stories. Take brief items from the newspaper and discuss how the stories might have begun, or how they might eventually end. Working in small groups, students write outlines of events that happened to each member of the group at the weekend, and discuss their potential for making a story. Use individual class presentations to tell stories from the lives of older family members. Give the beginning of a story and each member of the class suggests an outline plot and a possible ending. Everyone brings in a photograph as the basis for making a narrative.</p>	<p>Websites with complete short stories that include many useful for teaching include: www.bibliomania.com/ShortStories/ www.short-stories.co.uk www.schoolzone.co.uk ; The Study of Plot in English (Everything on this site can be translated into many languages)</p> <p>All legends, myths and fairy tales contain much useful resource material for narrative. Many novels also contain the techniques referred to here and are listed below where appropriate. The game Ex Libris, published by Oxford Games Ltd, Long Crendon, Bucks HP18 9RN is a superb tool for developing the skills of narrative, especially beginnings and endings; it is also very entertaining.</p>
<p><u>2.Introducing characters and point of view</u></p> <p>Although every story depends on characters, there should not be too many. One or two well-developed characters will be more</p>	<p>Using some of the brief stories discussed in the lessons on PLOT, develop them in various ways by focusing on different characters who each tell their part of the story.</p>	<p>www.schoolzone.co.uk ; The Study of Character in English</p>

<p>effective in 600-900 words than a cast of thousands. The point of view of the story needs to be decided. It could be told by an omniscient narrator* in the third person (he/she/they) or focused on one individual's actions and feelings in the first person (I)</p> <p>The main character could be an observer or by-stander or one of the main initiators of the action.</p> <p>*An omniscient narrator is one who knows everything that is happening, and has a kind of god-like knowledge and overview.</p>	<p>A newspaper story is always in the third person, for example, with some occasional sentences of direct speech in the first person. Rewrite a third person story in the first person from the point of view of two of the people in the story. Pairs or small groups could develop the characters through role play and be questioned by other members of the class about the characters' appearance, personality and state of mind. Compare the different effects gained.</p> <p>Writing practice: Develop the thoughts and feelings of characters about a short series of events, using the point of view of an observer, rather than one of the main actors. Write brief conversations between characters, trying to show what is happening in their words without telling it directly to the reader. This could be in play form. Write a story in the form of several diary entries, or letters between friends.</p>	<p>Sims, RJ <i>The Short Story</i> in Brodie's Notes (Pan 1991) is a useful introduction</p> <p>Poe often uses the first person, Hardy the third</p> <p><u>Working with Short Stories</u> (Kilduff, Hamer and McCannon) CUP ISBN 0 521 37795 1</p> <p><u>Narratives</u> (Andrews and Fisher) CUP ISBN 0 521 39968 8</p> <p>Fitzgerald: <i>The Great Gatsby</i> – the character of Nick Carraway, for example, is an observer</p>
<p><u>3.Using timescale and flashback</u></p> <p>A series of events takes place in 'real time' in chronological order (A-Z or 1-10) A storyteller can make choices about when to start the story, possibly in the middle or near the end) and then flash backwards or forwards, to gain particular effects. A popular strategy in short stories of the 19th Century was to use a framework, perhaps of a group of characters talking together and one telling a story which is the main theme of the narrative. Many ghost stories were written using this structure.</p>	<p>Students find this playing with time fascinating. Use a numbered chronological series of events as a basis (say 1-6) Working in small groups, find ways to tell the story in any way other than 1,2,3,4,5,6 and share findings. Discuss the effectiveness of each method.</p> <p>Write a framework story.</p> <p>Write a paragraph in the present tense and write the same paragraph in the past tense. Consider the different effect and how it could be used in a story.</p>	<p>Emily Bronte's novel <i>Wuthering Heights</i> is one of the best examples of complex narrative methodology , and could be used selectively for illustration.</p> <p>Guy de Maupassant's short stories often use frameworks.</p> <p>The work of Margaret Atwood is usually in the present tense</p>

<p>In 600 – 900 words the timescale will not usually be very broad. Even within this limitation, certain events can be told more briefly and others suggested in more detail, compared with their real time equivalents.</p>	<p>Discuss the kinds of events where time seems to move slowly and others where time rushes by, and how these could be expressed in a story for a particular effect</p>	<p>Maya Angelou's Autobiography <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> covers seven years in one sentence and a few minutes in two chapters.</p> <p>In Joseph Conrad's <i>The Secret Agent</i> time almost stands still for the description of a murder</p>
<p><u>4. Effective Openings</u></p> <p>An effective opening to a story should hold the reader's interest straight away. A nineteenth century story would begin with an introduction or exposition, but a more modern approach might be to plunge into the middle of the action and leave the readers to work out gradually who the characters are and what their situation is.</p>	<p>Work on openings provides the opportunity for variety of approach and effect. Take a simple narrative and try writing two different openings: 1) by the exposition of a character and the events leading up to the action of the story and 2) by going straight into the middle of a dialogue between the same character and another one, which suggests events more indirectly than 1)</p> <p>Discuss the effectiveness of each method.</p> <p>Small groups could consider whether there are other ways of opening a story, researching the openings of stories by published writers and presenting their findings to the class. Examination questions sometimes ask for the opening of a story, so practice is important</p>	<p>The openings of short stories by Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens could be compared with the openings of stories by Raymond Carver, Anita Desai and Ernest Hemingway.</p>
<p><u>5. Appropriate endings</u></p> <p>An appropriate ending for a story is best planned from the outset. It is not advisable to start and then just write in a rambling fashion until there is no time left. Another common mistake is to end the story with a murder, an earthquake or similar highly dramatic climax which is unlikely and unconvincing in the context of the story as a whole. Some possibilities for endings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a change in the point of view - a return to the frame in a framework story 	<p>This could usefully match up the work on openings. Take a narrative already discussed and try two or three different endings. Discuss in small groups which is most effective, and in what ways.</p> <p>Again, small groups could look at endings of published stories, analysing their methods and effects.</p>	<p>Play the game Ex Libris</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a summary of events - a 'twist in the tail', an unexpected or ironic ending can be effective - a symbol which represents an important aspect of the story and has perhaps been used earlier - an open-ended or even inconclusive ending revolving around a character's consciousness (the word 'closure' implies a completion or rounding off, and may not always be achieved) 		<p>Stories by: Edgar Allen Poe Katherine Mansfield De Maupassant O' Henry Saki (HH Munro) Ambrose Bierce Alice Munro James Joyce</p> <p>DH Lawrence</p> <p>Raymond Carver</p>
<p><u>6. Evoking settings</u></p> <p>In a short story of 600-900 words, too many different settings are not advisable. A few touches of apt description should be sufficient to create the atmosphere of a particular place (see Unit 5 on description) If working in a particular genre, then the setting should be suitable for that (see below)</p>	<p>Written exercises here can be limited to a paragraph setting a scene to create an atmosphere: e.g. a busy market, a moonlit scene, school break time, by the sea.</p> <p>Vocabulary work: this could be combined with the work suggested on imaginative writing</p>	<p>www.schoolzone.co.uk ; The Study of Setting in English</p>
<p><u>7. Working with Genre</u></p> <p>The genre of a story is its type or kind: some common short story genres are mystery, detective, science fiction, war, romance, the supernatural and so on. It is not necessary for candidates to choose to write in a particular genre unless the exam question specifies it. Many stories could best be categorised as the human interest genre: relationships, feelings, memories, all explored within daily routines. These can be very effective.</p>	<p>This is a suitable area for pairs/small group work at first, to stimulate ideas before working on individual genre stories.</p> <p>Students should be encouraged to think of other genres for the short story than the ones mentioned, and research some writers who work successfully in those genres.</p>	<p>A few examples: Detective stories: Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, Raymond Chandler Horror stories: Roald Dahl, Edgar Allen Poe Science fiction: Arthur C Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov</p> <p>Human Interest: DH Lawrence. Thomas Hardy, Katherine Mansfield; Raymond Carver</p>

<p><u>8. Useful strategies for bringing the story together</u></p> <p>Only practice in writing will develop skills to a high level. Some strategies to work on include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - showing not telling; students always want to tell the reader everything; character can be shown through action not authorial statement - repetition of key words for structural coherence can be very effective - ellipsis: being concise and making choices; accepting that you don't have to cover everything, and that suggestion can be very powerful - description, imagery and symbolism (covered in detail in the Unit on description) - appropriate balance of the different elements of the story; too much description may hinder the progress of the narrative; as may too much dialogue, for example 	<p>Students should be encouraged to plan and redraft their stories at first, aiming for coherence of effect.</p> <p>For each of the suggestions made except the last one, write a paragraph incorporating it to show how it can work effectively.</p>	<p>Raymond Carver and Ernest Hemingway in their different ways illustrate the power of elliptical writing</p>
<p><u>9. Good Practice</u></p> <p>Reading Writing Sharing</p>	<p>Read as many good short stories as possible Read stories out loud and discuss their effectiveness Do as much timed practice as possible before the examination, including essay plans Read and comment on each others' work Display good examples on the walls of the classroom Create a volume of the best short stories written by the class</p>	<p>Past papers: study all narrative questions, and practise them Standards booklet: consider the evidence and the examiner's comments Acquire the published exemplar material from CIE for reference</p>